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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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See Memo 1/2/59

Memorandum of Conversation

Schaumburg Palace, Bonn

DATE: February 8, 1959  
10:30 - 12:00 a.m.

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EO 11652: XGDS ① ② ③ ④

SUBJECT:

Authorized By: H. D. Brewster  
August 4, 1975

FEB 11 1959

PARTICIPANTS:

Chancellor Adenauer

Dr. von Brentano, Foreign Minister

Dr. von Scherpenberg, Secretary of  
State in the Foreign Office

Mr. Weber, Interpreter for the  
Chancellor

The Secretary

Ambassador Bruce

Mr. Merchant

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American Embassy, Bonn

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Prior to meeting with the larger group as planned, the Chancellor indicated that he would like to have a short discussion with the Secretary in the presence of only a few advisers. Ambassador Bruce will obtain from Mr. Weber and forward to the Department the verbatim record of the conversation which was kept by Mr. Weber as interpreter. The following is dictated from my own notes to provide an earlier though less complete record.

The Chancellor opened by saying that he desired to discuss further and in greater detail the critical situation of Berlin. He agreed that it was wise to bury the Berlin crisis under a layer of broader problems in a conference with the Russians. If the conference failed, however, then the Berlin crisis was likely to become more acute. In consequence he thought there might be need for an interim or provisional solution of the problem of Berlin. If force were used the crisis would indeed become acute. Hence his thought of the provisional solution. He said that he had no answer to the problem himself but could describe in negative terms the boundaries which any such solution should not transgress. First, he said he attached the utmost importance to the maintenance of Western unity. (Later questions of the Secretary indicated that he was thinking of the French, British and US and that he was fearful that the British would show weakness. The Secretary agreed on the importance of

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maintaining unity and said that he believed that we had it but that it was equally important that the Federal Republic should act in full agreement with the three Western powers since it was obviously most intimately involved.) Secondly, the Chancellor said we should not advance to any position which would require later withdrawal because of the damage it would do to Western prestige. (Under a question from the Secretary he said that he meant retreat from any physical position.) Thirdly, the Chancellor said the situation should not be permitted to develop to any use of nuclear weapons.

In response the Secretary said that it was essential that we employ the necessary counter force if we found ourselves opposed by force. This required that we must face up to the possibility of a general nuclear war in which he noted the United States would prove to be the main target. He said that it would be disastrous for us to be committed to a conventional war in Europe. Surely this would please the Soviets with their great superiority in manpower and conventional weapons.

The Chancellor said that possibly he had been misunderstood. His nuclear point was addressed to the avoidance of using non-conventional weapons against the GDR alone.

The Secretary then reviewed in detail the program for dealing with a substitution of the GDR for the Soviets on May 27 or earlier. When he came to the later stages after physical obstructions had been encountered and we had concurrently launched a political, propaganda offensive against the Soviets and serious military preparations such as partial mobilization, he said we should, if this political offensive brought no change in the Soviet-GDR attitude and obstruction of our forces, send in an armored division to open up the land route. If this division encountered resistance then obviously a general war had started in which we obviously would not forego the use of nuclear weapons. The Secretary concluded by saying that he was absolutely convinced that if we in the West were united and willing to take the risk of such general war then the Soviets will withdraw from their present position. We must, however, have the will (which he could assure the Chancellor the United States possessed) to use those elements of force in which we are superior. To fail to do so would be to invite defeat on a purely conventional battleground.

The Chancellor said that the unity of the British, French and United States was even more important than atomic bombs. (He did not elaborate his thought but I construed it as meaning

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that he considered such unity even more effective as a deterrent to the Soviets than our possession of nuclear weapons.) He again hinted at his fear of British softness by citing the contrast in attitudes between the US truck drivers in the Marienborn incident who had stayed with their trucks more than fifty hours resolutely refusing inspection whereas the British truck driver in a similar incident at about the same time had protested but permitted inspection and been allowed to pass through.

The Secretary then said that the prime purpose of his present trip was further to cement Western unity and that he believed it existed. He emphasized that it was equally necessary that the Federal Republic be with us. He said that if the Federal Republic was not willing to pursue as strong a policy as we proposed, now was the time that we should be so informed.

The Chancellor said that his government was prepared to follow the program which the Secretary had outlined but that he feared a world war over Berlin would not have behind it public support in France, the UK, Germany or the United States.

The Secretary said that he could assure the Chancellor that the policy he had outlined would have public support in the United States and that he was equally sure that the Governments of France and Great Britain were in favor of a strong stand. In fact he said the only difference among the three powers was that the French were inclined to be more truculent.

The Chancellor reiterated that he supported the two-stage contingency plan proposed by the Secretary. He thought it was correct and that his government would support it.

The Secretary then asked what the Chancellor had in mind when he spoke of a provisional solution for Berlin.

The Chancellor said that the best provisional solution, which he was not sure we could get, would be an indefinite deferral of the May 27 date when the Soviets had promised they would turn over their rights to the GDR. He said that he was concerned over the very real possibility of growing nervousness and even an exodus from West Berlin as the date approached.

The Chancellor then raised (as he had at the NATO Heads of Government Meeting in 1957) the question of extending the life of the North Atlantic Treaty beyond the 20-year period which ended in 1968.

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The Secretary reminded him that we had stated thereafter, responsive to his request, that we in the United States felt that the North Atlantic Treaty should be regarded as of indefinite duration.

The Chancellor thought this was not good enough.

The Secretary said that we would bear in mind this proposal and would not oppose an amendment to the Treaty extending it say for 20 years (as the Chancellor subsequently suggested) but that he felt strongly the present was not timely for any such action in light of de Gaulle's dissatisfaction with the terms and breadth of the Treaty. He feared that any opening up of the Treaty for extension would invite French amendments which would be undesirable. With the passage of time, however, de Gaulle would no doubt become more familiar with and fonder of NATO.

The Chancellor then suggested that they join the larger group which was waiting in the conference room.

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